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ABSTRACT

This study examined the complimenting behavior of men and women in the United States by collecting a corpus of 90 compliment behaviors from television programs, ethnographic observation, and the author. It also explored the relationship between sociolinguistic research and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in general and complimenting behavior and TESOL in specific. Results of the complimenting behavior study showed that women use compliments to each other significantly more often than they do to men or men to each other. Women also use a syntactic form that strengthens the positive force of the compliment significantly more often than men do, whereas men use a form that attenuates or hedges on compliment force significantly more often than women do. A review of six TESOL textbooks that emphasize communicative competence found that most textbook passages and dialogues focused on compliment exchanges between equals, and that most compliments concerned appearance, ability, or possessions. It was discovered that women received more compliments than men, that women gave more compliments than men, and that women of higher status received more compliments than men of higher status. A sample lesson plan on compliment behavior for TESOL classes is also included. (MDM)

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ED 368 195

INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON COMPLIMENT EXCHANGE IN AMERICAN ENGLISH[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Janet Holmes did a study in New Zealand that examined differences in the way men and women use compliments. Inspired by Holmes' work, I am here attempting, in the first section of this paper, to replicate the study on a smaller scale with data on the complimenting behavior of men and women in the United States. Holmes hypothesizes that compliments may function differently in women's and men's interactions. Overall, my data reveals that American men and women do have similar complimenting behavior to men and women in New Zealand. I also found three compliment response patterns that Holmes does not mention and these are also explored.

In the second section, I briefly explore the relationship between sociolinguistic research and TESOL in general and complimenting behavior and TESOL in specific. Material from Nessa Wolfson's book Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL, and results of research done by Manes and Wolfson (1981), Wolfson (1983), Manes (1983), Holmes (1988), and Bolton (this study) form the basis for this discussion. I evaluate six textbooks looking at syntactic form, status of complimenters, topic of compliment, gender differences in compliment exchanges to see if the rules for using compliments which have been discovered in the research have been incorporated into teaching materials. I give a sample lesson on

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[1]. I would like to thank Professor Ralph Fasold for his encouragement and computer assistance.

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introducing compliments and their function in an ESL class as a way of stimulating thought on how materials can be supplemented and sociolinguistic aspects of speech can be incorporated into the ESL classroom.

DEFINITION OF A COMPLIMENT

Holmes comments on the difficulty in identifying what a compliment is: "analyses of speech functions such as compliments are often circular in that they do not provide information which would enable one to identify a compliment unless one already intuitively knew what utterances counted as compliments" (Irvine in Holmes, 1988). She gives the following broad definition.

> A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.

I propose the following three felicity conditions for compliments following the format of Searle 1969:[2]

1) Hearer has certain quality Q.

2) Speaker believes Q is admirable.

3) Speaker wants hearer to know/believe that Speaker admires Q.

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[2]. I am indebted to Brent Gallenberger and other members of a graduate level pragmatics class at Georgetown University for suggesting these conditions.

HOLMES' THEORY SUMMARIZED

The most basic function of compliment is as an affective speech act used by the speaker to increase solidarity between the speaker and the addressee (Holmes, 1988). Holmes discovered that compliments may serve other functions as well. Using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory as a framework, Holmes arrived at three functions of compliment exchanges. First, compliments serve as positive affective speech acts by attending to positive face wants and increasing solidarity between people. Second, compliments can serve as positive politeness strategies before a face threatening act (FTA). This is called providing positive redress for the FTA. For example: "Don't those new chairs look wonderful! By the way, could I borrow your Spanish cookbook?" The third function is that compliments may be FTAs themselves as they may indicate an intrusive desire on the speaker's part towards the hearer or the hearer's possessions.

In the New Zealand corpus, there is some evidence to indicate that women and men use and interpret compliments differently in that women interact with compliments as a sign of solidarity while men see them as FTAs. Holmes summarized her evidence as follows (Holmes, 1988):

1) women use compliments to each other significantly more often than they do to men or men do to each other;
2) women use a syntactic form which strengthens the positive force of the compliment significantly more often than men do, whereas men use a form which attenuates or hedges on compliment force significantly more often than women do;

3) women compliment each other on appearance more than on any other topic and this is a topic which is generally regarded as most appropriate between equals, friends and intimates, least threatening, most 'gratuitous' (vs. required by politeness) and most other-oriented;
4) compliments on possessions (which are those most obviously perceived as FTAs) are used significantly more often between males;
5) compliments to those of different status tend to focus on skills or performance, reinforcing the importance of female-preferential appearance compliments as solidarity signals;
6) women of higher status are more likely to receive compliments than higher status men suggesting that complimenters may be aware of the risk of discomfiting higher status men with an FTA;
7) men's evasive compliment responses more often take the form of a marked avoidance strategy than women's do, suggesting they are more anxious to avoid recognizing and responding to a compliment than women.

I will take up each of these items separately and compare it to my data, highlighting any differences that arise.

METHODOLOGY

Holmes collected a corpus of 484 New Zealand compliment exchanges with the help of 25 students, 92% of whom were female. They used the ethnographic method established by Manes and Wolfson. The students wrote down as soon as possible and as accurately as possible twenty or so compliments including any relevant contextual data. Since the complimenters were predominately middle class New Zealanders of European descent, Holmes focuses on the norms of this group.

I collected a corpus of 90 compliments using three methods: the ethnographic method of Manes and Wolfson, consciously giving compliments myself when I admired a quality of a person, and

noting compliments given on three television talk shows (The Arsenio Hall Show, Saturday Night with Connie Chung and In Person). The complimenters in this study are mainly middle and upper class Americans of European and African descent.

Three caveats must be mentioned about the data, the first pertaining to both the American and the New Zealand data and the other two pertaining only to the American study. First, the compliment exchanges in the New Zealand corpus and my American corpus were collected mainly by female researchers. The researchers' sex may potentially have biased the data. (I will discuss this aspect in further detail below.) Second, the American corpus is so small that any patterns found in the complimenting behavior can be seen only as possible trends which would have to be further replicated. Third, the methods by which I collected the compliments may have influenced the data. I shall emphasize cases were I believe the methodology effected the complimenting patterns.

COMPARING THE DATA

"Women use compliments to each other significantly more often then they do to men or men do to each other".

Table 1 shows that my data indicated the same pattern of behavior in America. In the New Zealand data, women gave 67.7% of all the compliments recorded and received 74.3% of them In the American data women gave 61.1% and received 65.6% of all compliments recorded.

Table 1
Compliments according to sex of participants
Holmes

Complimenter-Recipient	Number	%
Female-Female (F-F)	248	51.2
Female-Male (F-M)	80	16.5
Male-Female (M-F)	112	23.1
Male-Male (M-M)	44	9.0
Total	484	100.0

Compliments according to sex of participants
Bolton

Complimenter-Recipient	Number	%
Female-Female (F-F)	43	47.8
Female-Male (F-M)	12	13.3
Male-Female (M-F)	16	17.8
Male-Male (M-M)	19	21.1
Total	90	100.0

In general, the data is similar except that my corpus shows a much greater percentage of men complimenting men. This may point to a real difference between New Zealand and American complimenting behavior. But it must be pointed out that most of my male-male compliments were taken from talk shows where the atmosphere is some what artificial. Because of this, I hesitate to say the difference is meaningful until more data is collected. A study would have to be done on compliments given on television and compare it to a study done where equal numbers of male and female data collectors are involved to see if the complimenting behavior on television is the same as in daily life.

The sex of the data collectors is at issue here. Holmes pointed out that 92% of her observers were female students and this might have influenced the data. The majority of my data was also collected by women so the same consideration holds. However, when

Holmes manipulated her figures to see what the results would have been if there were an equal number of male and female collectors, compliments between females would still be more frequent then compliments between men, but not to such an extreme degree (60% vs. 40%) (Holmes, 1988).

"Women use a syntactic form which strengthens the positive force of the compliment significantly more often than men do, whereas men use a form which attenuates or hedges on compliment force significantly more often than women do."

Although compliments are used quite often in New Zealand and the United States, they are formulaic speech acts "in that a very small number of lexical items and syntactic patterns account for the great majority of them" (Holmes, 1988). Manes and Wolfson who studied a corpus of 686 American compliments found that three syntactic patterns accounted for 85% of all compliments. In the New Zealand corpus, these three syntactic patterns accounted for 72% of all the compliments collected and in my study for 73% of all compliments.

Holmes found that the syntactic patterns used by men and women were more similar than different and that Pattern 1 was the most widely used pattern regardless of sex (Table 2). The main difference between male and female behavior in Holmes' study as far as syntactic structure is concerned involved women using Pattern 4 significantly more often then men, and men using Pattern 5 significantly more often then women. Pattern 4 is a rhetorical pattern involving exclamatory word order and intonation (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik in Holmes, 1988). Holmes states that

compliments are "quintessentially expressive in function" and that "the exclamatory patter [in 4] used syntactic means to reinforce this function" thus strengthening the positive force of the compliment. Pattern 5, on the other hand "reduces the syntactic pattern to the minimum elements" thus attenuating the force of the compliment (Holmes, 1988).

In my study the female complimenting behavior is very similar to the complimenting behavior of females in the New Zealand study (Table 2). Differences occur in the syntactic choices by males for expressing compliments. The men in my study used Pattern 1 more than the females whereas in the New Zealand study men and women used the pattern equally. American men used the pattern 28.6% more than New Zealand men did, a difference large enough to merit further research. The fact that most of the male-given compliments were taken from talk shows may have influenced the data. Television talk shows have an external audience, both male and female, and the environment is somewhat formal. It would make sense that if a person were to compliment someone on the show, they would do so in the most general way. Pattern 1 is the most common and widely used syntactic choice by both men and women and might be used more often by people on television for that reason. If this hypothesis is true, it would mean that my data has been influenced by my methodology.

Table 2
Syntactic patterns of compliments according to speaker sex
Holmes

Syntactic formula[a]	F		M	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. (a) NP BE (int) ADJ				
(b) BE LOOKING	140	42.1	64	40.0
2. I (INT) LIKE NP	59	17.8	21	13.1
3. (a) PRO BE a (INT) ADJ NP				
(b) PRO BE (INT) (a) ADJ NP	38	11.4	25	15.6
4. What (a) (ADJ) NP!	26	7.8	2	1.25
5. (INT) ADJ (NP)	17	5.1	19	11.8
6. Isn't NP ADJ	5	1.5	1	0.6
Total 285	85.7	132	82.4	

[a]Following Manes and Wolfson (1981) BE represents any copula verb, LIKE represents any verb of likeing: eg. love, enjoy, admire, ADJ represents any semantically positive adjective and INT represents any boosting intensifier eg. really, very

Syntactic patterns of compliments according to speaker sex
Bolton

Syntactic formula[a]	F		M	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. (a) NP BE (int) ADJ				
(b) BE LOOKING	27	49.09	24	68.57
2. I (INT) LIKE NP	8	14.55	1	2.86
3. (a) PRO BE a (INT) ADJ NP				
(b) PRO BE (INT) (a) ADJ NP	5	9.09	1	2.86
4. What (a) (ADJ) NP!	5	9.09	--	--
5. (INT) ADJ (NP)	4	7.27	1	2.86
6. Isn't NP ADJ	--	--	--	--
7. Other	6	10.91	8	22.86
Total 55	100.0035		100.00	

"Women compliment each other on appearance more than on any other topic and this is a topic which is generally regarded as most appropriate between equals, friends and intimates, least threatening, most gratuitous (vs. required by politeness) and most other-oriented".

The topics most compliments refer to are appearance, ability or performance, possessions, and some aspect of personality or friendliness. In Holmes' study the first two categories alone accounted for 81.2% of the data, and in my study, the first two categories accounted for 82.2%.

In the New Zealand study the differences in complimenting behavior between males and females are highly significant (Table 3). Three factors contribute to this fact. First, in female interaction, there is a high proportion of compliments on appearance (61%). Second, men tend to compliment each other on possessions (25%). Finally, there is a tendency for men to compliment women on ability or skill (44%).

As Homes (1988:455) notes: "A compliment on someone's appearance is difficult to interpret other then as an expression of solidarity, a positively affective speech act, so the predominance of this compliment topic in women's interactions is consistent with the view that women use compliments for this positive function. Compliments on possessions are much more vulnerable to interpretation as FTAs since...there is the possibility that the complimenter will be heard as expressing desire for the object referred to. To this extent men's greater use of these compliments reinforces the suggestion that they are more likely to perceive and experience compliments as potential FTAs".

Table 3
Interaction between compliment topic and sex of participants
Holmes

Topic	F-F	M-F	F-M	M-M
Appearance	151 (61)	53 (47)	32 (40)	16 (36)
Ability/performance	50 (20)	49 (44)	28 (35)	14 (32)
Possessions	30 (12)	2 (2)	9 (11)	11 (25)
Personality/friendship	10 (4)	5 (4)	8 (10)	2 (5)
Other	7 (3)	3 (3)	3 (4)	1 (2)
Total	248	112	80	44

Note: Percentages are given in parentheses.

My data reveals a pattern which is slightly different from the one in Holmes' data. Of the three factors that produced highly significant differences between the complimenting behavior of females and males in New Zealand, two are correspondingly influential in my data. Women complimented each other proportionately more on appearance (60.47%) then on any other topic. Second, there is a roughly equal tendency for men to compliment women on either appearance or skill and performance.

The difference pertains to Holmes' findings that men prefer to compliment other men on their possessions. In my corpus, not one compliment between men that referred to possessions was found. I believe this is the result of the unrealistic environment created on talk shows where most of my male-male compliments were observed. Most of the males on these shows are professional athletes or successful actors. This is not representative of the male

population in large. The majority of compliments between males referred to ability or performance. Considering the professions of these males this would seem reasonable.

"Compliments on possessions (which are those most obviously perceived as FTAs) are used significantly more often between males".

This evidence was discussed above. Holmes used a Chi-square test which was significant at p=0.000005. My data is too sparse to support a Chi-square test of significance. Although my data does not support this finding, methodological factors prevent us from drawing firm conclusions concerning the results.

"Compliments to those of different status tend to focus on skills or performance, reinforcing the importance of female-preferential appearance compliments as solidarity signals".

In the New Zealand data and the American data, compliments between status equals predominate (79% and 73% respectively). When compliments do occur between people of different status, Holmes discovered some interesting patterns (see Tables 4 and 5). First, higher status females are twice as likely to be complimented then higher status males. This suggests that higher status females are more receptive to compliments than their male counterparts. Second, compliments, whether directed upward or downward, were twice as likely to refer to work performance or skill (54%). Only 27% of the compliments addressed to those of unequal statues referred to appearance. Between equals, the opposite is true, only 25% of the compliments referred to performance or skill while 57% referred to appearance. Third, even though appearance compliments are the most

common between equals regardless of sex, this pattern is stronger between women than between men.

The majority of the compliments to those of unequal status in my study also focused on skill or performance while the majority of compliments between status equals referred to the hearer's appearance. My data also supports the finding that compliments on appearance between equals are more frequent between women than between men. Because of the small size of my corpus, my data is inconclusive on Holmes' finding that higher status females are complimented more often then higher status males. One higher status female in my data was complimented by a female and four higher status males were complimented, three by females, one by a male.

Table 4
Distribution of compliments by relative status and sex of participants
Holmes

Relative Status	Sex of Complimenter-Recipient F-F	M-F	F-M	M-M
Recipient is higher in status	31 (12.5)	17 (15)	5 (6.3)	4 (9)
Recipient is equal in status	193 (77.8)	84 (75)	70 (87.5)	34 (77.3)
Recipient is lower in status	24 (9.7)	11 (9.8)	5 (6.2)	6 (13.6)
Total	248	112	80	44

Note: Percentages are given in parentheses.

Table 5
Distribution of compliments by status, sex of participants and topic
Holmes

	Sex of Complimenter-Recipient F-F %	M-F %	F-M %	M-M %
Recipient is higher is status				
Appearance	4.8	1.8	--	2.3
Possessions	2.4	0.9	1.3	2.3
Skill	4.8	11.6	3.8	4.6
Recipient is equal in status				
Appearance	50.4	45.5	40	31.8
Possessions	8.9	0.9	8.8	22.7
Skill	12.9	23.2	27.5	15.9
Recipient is lower in status				
Appearance	5.7	--	--	2.3
Possessions	0.8	--	1.3	--
Skill	2.4	8.9	3.8	11.4
Total	86.5	92.8	93.1	93.1

"Women of higher status are more likely to receive compliments than higher status men suggesting that complimenters may be aware of the risk of discomfiting higher status men with an FTA."

This was discussed above. My data is inconclusive because of the small size of my corpus. Further study is needed in this area of American complimenting behavior.

"Men's evasive compliment responses more often take the form of a marked avoidance strategy than women's do, suggesting they are more anxious to avoid recognizing and responding to a compliment than women".

Holmes found evidence in male and female responses to compliments that women tend to interpret compliments as positively affective speech acts and men see compliments functioning as FTAs. Compliment responses are interesting to look at because they are a resolution of a conflict inherent in being complimented. As Pomerantz points out "in any conversational exchange, the preferred second part will represent an agreement with the previous utterance" (in Holmes, 1988). The receiver of the compliment is thus pressured to agree with the complimenter and accept the compliment. "On the other hand, there is strong pressure on speakers to avoid or minimize self-praise" (Holmes, 1988). Because of this conflict, responses are much more varied than the compliments, but the vast majority fall under three broad headings, ACCEPT, REJECT and DEFLECT or EVADE. Under each category are a number of sub-categories. Overall, most men and women in the New Zealand data respond to a compliment with an agreeing comment and compliments are usually accepted.

Holmes found that there was no significant differences between

men and women in choice of overall strategies, but within each broad category there were some differences. Men tend to ignore or legitimately evade a compliment more often than women. In fact, ignoring or legitimately evading a compliment were the second most popular male response strategies. Since these strategies would be used more often when a compliment is viewed as embarrassing, males' preference for this strategy supports the idea that men interpret compliments as FTAs more often than women did.

There are more differences in this area between my study and Holmes' than in the sections examining compliment-giving behavior. I believe that these differences offer strong support to item 7 above that men use a marked avoidance strategy when evading a compliment more often then women, suggesting that they are more anxious to avoid recognizing and responding to compliments than women are. I should point out that I introduced a sub-category under the broad heading of Deflect/Evade, which I call **Lax Acknowledgement**, that Holmes did not use. These responses could almost be classified as a type of ignoring, however the compliment is briefly acknowledged. This acknowledgement is usually a non-verbal response such as the nodding of the head or a shrugging of the shoulders often with avoidance of eye contact. Less frequently, there is a vocal response, for example, a marked clearing of the throat, an embarrassed laugh or the use of the discourse marker **well** with no follow up response. This sub-category accounts for 15.6% of all compliment responses in my corpus and 22.9% of all responses made by men.

Table 6
Compliment responses according to responder's sex
Holmes

Response type	F No.	F %	M No.	M %
A. ACCEPT				
1. Appreciation/agreement token eg. thanks, yes	52	15.8	18	15.8
2. Agreeing utterance eg. I think it's lovely too.	110	33	40	35
3. Downgrading/qualifying utterance eg. It's not too bad is it.	29	8.8	11	9.6
4. Return compliment eg. You're looking good too.	14	4.2	4	3.5
Subtotal	205	62	73	64
B. REJECT				
1. Disagreeing utterance eg. I'm afraid I don't like it much.	23	7	5	4.4
2. Question accuracy eg. Is beautiful the right word?	7	2.1	3	2.6
3. Challenge sincerity eg. You don't really mean that.	3	0.9	1	0.9
Subtotal	33	10	9	7.9
C. DEFLECT/EVADE				
1. Shift credit eg. My mother knitted it.	5	1.5	--	--
2. Informative comment eg. I bought it at The Gap.	33	10	9	7.9
3. Ignore eg. It's time we were leaving.	8	2.4	6	5.3
4. Legitimate evasion Context needed to illustrate	29	8.8	16	14
5. Request reassurance/repetition eg. Do you really think so?	17	5.2	5	4.4
Subtotal	92	27.8	36	31.6
Total[a]	330	100	118	100

[a]There were 36 compliments followed immediately by a second compliment (eg. What a lovely jacket. It really suits you). While formally these can be analyzed as two syntactically different compliment patterns, they generally elicited just one response. Hence the total number of responses (440) is smaller than the total number of compliments analyzed (484).

Table 6
Compliment responses according to responder's sex
Bolton

Response type	F No.	F %	M No.	M %
A. ACCEPT				
1. Appreciation/agreement token eg. thanks, yes	29	52.7	10	28.6
2. Agreeing utterance eg. I think it's lovely too.	4	7.3	5	14.3
3. Downgrading/qualifying utterance eg. It's not too bad is it.	5	9.1	1	2.9
4. Return compliment eg. You're looking good too.	--	--	--	--
Subtotal	38	69.1	16	45.7
B. REJECT				
1. Disagreeing utterance eg. I'm afraid I don't like it much.	1	1.8	3	8.6
2. Question accuracy eg. Is beautiful the right word?	--	--	--	--
3. Challenge sincerity eg. You don't really mean that.	--	--	--	--
Subtotal	1	1.8	3	8.6
C. DEFLECT/EVADE				
1. Shift credit eg. My mother knitted it.	--	--	--	--
2. Informative comment eg. I bought it at The Gap.	1	1.8	--	--
3. Ignore eg. It's time we were leaving.	5	9.1	5	14.3
4. Legitimate evasion Context needed to illustrate	--	--	--	--
5. Request reassurance/repetition eg. Do you really think so?	4	7.3	3	8.6
6. **Lax acknowledgement** Contest needed to illustrate	6	10.9	8	22.8
Subtotal	16	29.1	16	45.7
Total	55	100	35	100

There are other differences to take into consideration. Even though the overall percentages in the broad categories for women are similar, there is one within category difference to point out. Whereas women in the New Zealand data often chose an agreeing utterance to accept a compliment, the women in my data overwhelming chose to use an appreciation/agreement token response when accepting a compliment (52.7%). Men also used appreciation/agreement tokens to accept compliments rather than the agreeing utterances used more commonly by New Zealand men. In fact, 76.3% of all accepting responses in my data fell into the sub-category of accepting compared to only 31.6% in the New Zealand corpus. Recalling Pomerantz's comments on the conflict inherent in receiving a compliment, it may be the case that New Zealanders tend to feel less constrained to avoid or minimize self-praise than Americans do. An appreciation/agreement token such as "thank you" accepts the self-praise less strongly then an agreeing utterance such as "I think it's lovely too". On the other hand, New Zealanders may feel more pressure to agree with the previous utterance then Americans.

Most importantly, in the American corpus men used Deflect/Evade responses 45.7% of the time, 37.1% of the responses being the marked avoidance strategies, ignoring and lax acknowledgement. Women use Deflect/Evade strategies only 29.09% of the time, 20% of them being marked avoidance strategies. These figures indicate even greater tendency for American men to avoid recognizing and responding to compliments than is seen in Holmes' study. It is possible that American men tend to experience compliments as FTAs even more strongly then New Zealand men or perhaps it is just strong support

for Holmes' overall theory.

THE DISCOURSE MARKER WELL AND MULTIPLE RESPONSES

While studying the compliment responses of men and women in my corpus, I noticed three patterns that deserve further mention. One of the patterns relates directly to Holmes' theory on gender differences in the use and experience of compliments. The other two patterns show gender differences in use, but do not seem to relate, at least directly, to Holmes' findings. The pattern that related directly to Holmes' study was the use of what I call **lax acknowledgement** responses in order to deflect or evade compliments. This pattern was discussed above. Here I emphasize only that men used this response pattern more then twice as often as women (22.8% vs. 10.9%), possible supporting the hypothesis that men tend to interpret compliments as FTAs.

The second pattern I noticed was the frequent use of the discourse marker **well** before compliment responses (Table 7). Twenty two percent of all compliment responses begin with the marker **well**. Deborah Schiffrin's (1987) study of discourse markers showed that **well** marks a response that is troublesome; that there will be some problem with coherence. It can also preface a dispreferred second response. Schiffrin discovered that **well** is found more often when multiple responses are possible. This is consistent with compliment interactions since a variety of responses are possible (although they fall under a few broad types). It has been suggested that **well** may be used to indicate that the person is going to use a response that will acknowledge the speech act itself but not necessarily the

content of the utterance.[3] Since many compliment responses do tend to acknowledge the act itself rather than the content of the compliment, this could possibly be one reason for the use of **well** in responding to compliments. This idea would need to be studied further before anything conclusive could be said.

Table 7
The use of **well** to preface compliments by sex of participants

Response type	F-F	M-F	F-M	M-M
Well precedes	9 (20.9)	8 (50)	2 (16.7)	1 (5.3)
Well does not precede	34 (79.1)	10 (50)	8 (83.3)	18 (94.4)

Note: Percentages are given in parentheses.

Schiffrin noted that **well**, as a response marker, often prefaces a dispreferred second in a speech act. As Pomerantz points out, the preferred second part will agree with the previous utterance. My data seems to support this idea; the vast majority of all compliment responses are appreciation/agreement tokens. A difficulty here is that there is no fully preferred response to a compliment. No matter what the response, the hearer must either contradict the speaker or praise him/herself, violating a politeness principle. **Well** reveals that the receiver of a compliment faces a coherence problem whichever way s/he responds. Of the responses that are prefaced by **well** in my data, 16 (80%) of them preface an acceptance response. Thirteen of

[3]. I am indebted to Deborah Kennedy, a Ph.D Linguistic candidate at Georgetown University for this suggestion.

these (81.3%) preface appreciation/agreement tokens, supporting the idea that there is no really preferred response to compliments (appreciation/agreement would be the preferred response in Pomerantz' view).

Another factor is that women marked compliment responses with **well** significantly more often than men. Of all responses marked by **well**, 85% were by women. This difference may be skewed since the number of male responses in my data is very small.

If **well** tends to mark a dispreferred response, it indicates that the conflict is within the hearer. The definition for compliments given above specifies that the speaker admires a quality in the hearer. There is no mention of the hearer's feelings or beliefs about this quality. It is possible that the receiver of the compliment feels pressured to respond with the preferred second (or responds with the preferred second to acknowledge the role of the act itself), but has doubts internally that the compliment is true or that s/he is worthy of the compliment.

This finding rises a number of questions. What does this pattern mean? Do people use the marker **well** more often when addressed by someone of different status? Does the sex of the complimenter make a difference? Can we say the **well** is a linguistic marker for an internal psychological condition? Do we wish to combine psychological and linguistic research to explore this?

I noticed one final pattern. Of the 90 compliment responses I collected, 17 or 18.9% of them were multi-responses. I counted a response as a multi-response when two or three of the response types were used in the second to the compliment. I counted the first of a series of responses as the response type for that response. For example, if the response was, "Thanks. It's finally warm enough to wear it.", I counted the response type for table 6 to be appreciation/agreement token even though the complete response is appreciation/agreement token followed by an informative comment which is a deflect/evade response. Women used this pattern more often then men. With such small numbers, it is difficult to find any definite patterns. Half of these response types accepted and then deflected the compliment while the other half accepted the compliment twice. There was only one response that used three response types, a deflection followed by two acceptance responses. At this point, I have no conclusions about the last two response patterns.

SUMMARY OF SECTION ONE

In comparing my data with the data collected by Holmes, more support is found for her theory that compliments serve more than one function (at least in New Zealand and the United States) and that women tend to experience compliments as positively affective speech acts while men tend to experience them as FTAs. Though there were some differences noted in the complimenting behavior in our two corpuses, because of my small number of compliment exchanges, especially exchanges involving men, nothing conclusive can be said until a larger data base is collected by equal numbers of men and women data collectors.

Three trends were noted that merit further research. One of these is the compliment response that I call a **Lax Acknowledgement** which deflects the compliment, mostly by non-verbal means. Men utilize this strategy twice as much as women. Second, I discovered that the discourse marker **well** prefaced a number of compliment responses. The most interesting aspect is that **well** prefaced what would be considered preferred responses much more often then dispreferred responses. I suggested that the conflict inherent in being complemented may not be resolved by the person being addressed and the result is a marked linguist response, an idea that may require interdisciplinary study.

Third, I noted that some compliments received multiple responses. I could find no clear pattern of use in such a small number of examples.

As can be seen above, further research is needed. Like Janet Holmes, I see the need for studies to be done with equal numbers of female and male data collectors. It will be important to take note of non-verbal responses as well.

There is one other piece of evidence supporting Holmes' theory; so far, only women seem interested in exploring the realm of compliments. If men were not made uncomfortable by compliments, perhaps they would also be involved in this fascinating area of research.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC RESEARCH AND TESOL

"Research in sociolinguistics has come to have an ever increasing impact on the field of TESOL. To a great extent, this development has been due to the growing recognition that second language acquisition is, in fact, the acquisition of what Dell Hymes has called communicative competence" (Wolfson, 1989:vii-viii). Since the introduction of the concept, communicative competence, considerable work has been done on defining and/or expanding the concept. The definition given by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain in 1980 is "now the reference point for virtually all discussions of communicative competence vis-a-vis second language teaching" (Brown, 1987:199). The four essential competencies that Canale and Swain regard as comprising communicative competence can be summarized as follows:

1) Grammatical competence includes knowledge of, and accurate use of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-level semantics, phonology.

2) Discourse competence refers to the ability to combine groups of utterances in a cohesive and coherent fashion

to form meaningful texts, both spoken and written.

3) Sociolinguistic competence refers to the understanding of the social context of language use, i.e. the ability to take into account such factors as the topic, the role of the participant(s), setting, and norms of interaction.

4) Strategic competence includes the ability to employ verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variable or to inadequate competence.

This view has led to the developemnt of approaches like Communicative Language Teaching. These approaches "aim to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:66). In other words, they focus on not just teaching the form, i.e. grammatical competence, but on teaching discourse, strategic and sociolinguistic competence as well. By studying the sociolinguistic rules of conduct and interpretation that condition a speech act or event, a better idea of what we mean by communicative competence can be developed (Wolfson, 1989:7). As we increase our understanding of communicative competence, we can improve our teaching materials and methods.

Research such as reported in this paper contributes knowledge that needs to be incorporated into our lessons to address the issues of discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Since sociolinguistic rules are not universal, the need to understand and teach the rules of English-speaking communities to nonnative speakers of English is vital to the development of their communicative competence and abilities to communicate without misunderstandings (Wolfson, 1989). Developing an understanding of

the syntactic and semantic structure of different speech acts and events is one step. One may ask, "Why study complimenting behavior?" As Wolfson stated, "In some cases, as with compliments in American English, formulas exist without native speakers' being aware of them. But unless nonnative speakers had given compliments which the author [Wolfson] saw as inappropriate, it is unlikely that such speech behavior would have been seen as a topic worthy of research at all" (Wolfson, 1989:73). Since nonnative speakers compliment and respond to compliments inappropriately, this behavior needs to be explained to students to help them acquire the rules of complimenting behavior in American English and help reduce miscommunications.

In order to see how and if the rules of speech concerning compliment exchanges are being addressed in teaching materials, I evaluated six textbooks, (Milk and Honey (MH), Book 2, Bodman and Lanzano, 1981; In Touch (IT), Student's Book 3, Castro and Kimbrough, 1980; ExpressWays 2 (EW), Molinsky and Bliss, 1987 ; The Culture Puzzle (CP), Levine, Baxter and McNulty, 1987 ; Culturally Speaking (CS), Genzel and Cummings, 1986; Fitting In (FI), Coffey, 1983), on four aspects of complimenting behavior in American English based on research done by Wolfson (1983, 1989), Manes (1983), Holmes (1988) and Bolton (this study). The areas looked at are 1) the syntactic forms, 2) the status of the participants, 3) the topic of the compliment, and 4) the gender differences in complimenting behavior. These books were chosen based on date of publication (after 1980 when communicative approaches began to dominate) and stated format, i.e. they all purport to be based on a

communicative approach with the goal to help in the acquisition of communicative competence. Yet there is a "lack of analyses of sociolinguistic usage in American English" and these analyses "are desperately needed in order that materials developers and language teachers have concrete, empirically based information upon which to plan instructions" (Wolfson. 1989:79). Unfortunately, because of this lack of analyses, most materials developers and language teachers have relied on their intuition in planning instructions, but "the inadequacy of native speaker intuitions may be seen at all levels of language analysis" (Wolfson, 1989:40). As we continue to increase our resource of empirical data, we must continue to evaluate the materials we have in order to supplement them and/or develop new materials that allow us to objectively describe the rule of behavior for the purposes of language teaching.

In looking at this evaluation or in conducting an independent evaluation, there are some points to keep in mind. 1) What are the goals/needs of the students? If they will be using English with other nonnative speakers of English in their own countries, knowing the rules of compliment behavior in American English may not be important for them. If they will be studying, working and/or living in the United States, understanding complimenting behavior will probably be necessary. 2) What aspect of complimenting behavior and their functions are you going to teach? Compliments serve many functions, some which can be seen as sexist, some which can be seen as very positive. In this evaluation, I plan to look at how the textbooks address some of the features and functions of compliment behavior in middle-class American English.

EVALUATION

Form:

In the research, three syntactic patterns account for between 72% to 85% of all compliments (Manes 1982; Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1988; and Bolton, this study). They are:

1. (a) NP Be (Int) Adj (e.g. That coat is really great.)
   (b) Be Looking (Int) Adj (e.g. You're looking terrific.)

2. I (Int) Like NP (e.g. I simply love that skirt.)

3. (a) Pro Be a (Int) Adj NP (e.g. That's a very nice coat.)
   (b) Pro Be (Int) (a) Adj NP (e.g. That's really great juice.)

(BE represents any copula verb, LIKE represent and verb of liking: eg. love, enjoy, admire, ADJ represents any semantically positive adjective and INT represent any boosting intensifier e.g. really, very.)

Two other forms to look for in the textbooks are "(Int) Adj (NP)" (e.g. Really cool ear-rings, nice shot) and "What (a) (Adj) NP!" (e.g. What nice children, What a nice home). Though they are not the most frequent forms, men use the form "(Int) Adj (NP)" significantly more often then women, especially in male-male complimenting exchanges and women use the form "What (a) (Adj) NP!" significantly more often then men (Holmes, 1988).

All the textbooks I evaluated have examples of the three common syntactic forms except IT. There are only three compliment examples and they use forms 1a and 3a. No example using the second syntactic form is given. EW and CS provide examples in all three categories, but not all the subcategories. EW gives examples of 1a, 2 and 3b. CS gives examples of 1b, 2 and 3a. FI provides examples of all forms except 1a. FI, CP, and MH have examples using the pattern

"What (a) (Adj) NP!" though no mention of gender is given. MH is the only textbook that illustrates the form "(Int) Adj (NP)". The example is found under a list of compliments men might give so there is indication that this form is preferred by men more than women.

In general, the textbook writers seem to know the most common syntactic forms used and these are fairly well covered on a grammatical level. As mentioned above, there are some gender influences as to the choice of syntactic form and this is not mentioned, thus some sociolinguistic information is lacking.

The Status of the Participants:

Compliments between status equals account for between 70% and 79% of the compliment exchanges collected by Manes (1983), Wolfson (1983) Holmes (1988), and Bolton (this study). Very few compliments were addressed to those of higher status and if they were, they were most likely addressed to women. The rest of the compliments were addressed to those of lower status. This fact needs to be pointed out, and examples and practice situations involving status equals should dominate. In evaluating the textbooks, I looked at the percentage of examples that illustrate status equals exchanging compliments and also noted any explanatory comments that address the issue of status.

By looking at the examples, dialogues and situations, I found most of the textbooks focused on compliment exchanges between equals. Those textbooks that have few examples (IT and FI) situated their compliment exchanges between status equals 100% of the time. If only few examples are to be given, this is probably appropriate, but there should be some discussion of compliments directed at those

of unequal status in American English. The other four books vary between 64% and 92% of the compliment exchanges occurring between equals. Of the compliment exchanges between people of higher or lower status, more are given to those of lower status which matches the data. As mentioned above, women of higher status are much more likely then men to be complimented. Men of higher status are almost never complimented. In the textbooks, very few examples dealt with compliments between people of unequal status. Of the two that showed a lower status person complimenting a person of higher status, both were women complimenting a man. This does not correspond with the data that has been collected.

Overall, the textbooks contain situations that are realistic in respect to the status of the interlocutors as compared to the data, though there are some conflicts, especially between compliment exchanges between status unequals. No direct mention of status is mentioned except in MH. MH mentions that "When we want to compliment a supervisor (a boss), we have to be a little more careful about the language we use. We do not want him or her to think we are giving compliments because we want special favors or a promotion. So, when we compliment a superior, we usually make the compliment direct and simple. We are also careful not to say too much. When we receive a compliment from a supervisor we usually simply say 'Thank you'" (Bodman, 1981:119). This does not directly mention the fact that superiors are not complimented as a general rule, but it does acknowledge some differences and provides an opening to talk about this issue.

CP does not specifically point out issues regarding status,

but in the warm-up activity, they provide a nice place to supplement the text with this information. Questions are asked designed to activate the students' schemata, e.g. "In your own language and culture, when do people give compliments? Have you noticed any cultural differences between the way people compliment in your culture and in the U.S. culture?" (Levine, 1987:16). After discussing compliment behavior in other cultures, general features and functions of compliments in U.S. culture can be pointed out and discussed. The other four textbooks make no mention of status differences at all.

Topic of the compliment:

Appearance, ability or performance and possessions are the topics of most compliments. In my study, the first two categories accounted for 82% of all compliments, in Holmes' study (1988) they accounted for 81% of all compliments, and these topics predominate in compliment exchanges collected by Manes (1983) and Wolfson (1983). In the textbooks, compliments referring to appearance or ability are the ones most often found. There were only five compliments that referred to possessions.

Only CP addresses the issue of topics directly by providing a list of the kinds of things Americans usually compliment. The list includes physical appearance, personality, family members, abilities, possessions, meals and food (Levine, et al., 1987:19-20). This list corresponds wonderfully with the topics found complimented on in the research. MH also address the idea of topic by having the students circle from a list of topics the things that were complimented on in the previous examples. This is a less direct method, but can serve as a starting point for a discussion on the issue of topics. None of the other textbooks address this matter directly.

Gender differences in paying compliments:

Gender influences who compliments, who one compliments, who receives compliments, what one compliments, what syntactic form is used, how often one compliments, and how one responds to a compliment. In research done by Wolfson (1983), Manes (1983), Holmes (1988) and by Bolton (this study), we found that women receive more compliments than men, that women give more compliments

than men, and that women of higher status receive more compliments than men of higher status. Women receive more compliments on appearance and ability, and men more on ability and possessions. Both women and men compliment women mostly on appearance and then ability. Women compliment men on ability first, then appearance and men compliment men mostly on ability and then possession. Only MH directly addresses the issue of gender in some manner. MH mentions that gender influences the form one may choose to use when giving compliments. The authors state, "Research indicates that women feel freer to use more enthusiastic language (word like gorgeous, marvelous, and lovely) than men do. Both men and women use intensifiers (words like so, really, and absolutely), but women use them more frequently" (Bodman, 1981:118). They then proceed to give a list of what men and women might say in a particular situation to show the different forms they may use. They do have the men using the syntactic form "(INT) ADJ (NP)" which Holmes found to be used significantly more often by men in her study. MH does not address the difference in response to compliments, who gives and receives compliments more often or any other of the issues related to gender. As I mentioned above, CP provides an opportunity for the teacher to talk about these issues in the warm-up section.

Basically, none of the textbooks address the issue of gender and this is an important part of understanding how to give and receive compliments and their function in American English. This topic must be introduced by the teachers themselves.

In relation to gender, the issue of sexism in language must be mentioned in respect to compliment exchanges. This concern is too

complex to go into in depth here, but I will refer to a few of the dynamics mentioned by Wolfson (1988:171-173). Wolfson (1989:171-172) notes that:

> ..., one of the functions of compliments as used by speakers of American English is to encourage or reinforce desired behavior....[If] we take desired behavior to include performance not only in the sense of a job well done but also in the sense of acting out a socially accepted role, then it appears that nearly all compliments are social judgements of performance. If this is true, it provides an explanation for some sex-linked aspects of compliments which had not previously been clear.

One issue is the interaction of topic with the sex and status of the compliment receiver. Upper status men rarely receive compliments and almost never on appearance. They also receive fewer ability/performance compliments since it is a person of authority who has the right to judge and encourage subordinates. Men are often in such authoritative positions. Women, on the other hand, are often complimented on appearance and ability regardless of status. In light of compliments being seen as expressions of encouragement or approval of socially accepted role behavior, we see that women are expected to be preoccupied with their appearance and matters concerning home and children. Therefore, no matter what professional level a woman may attain, she is still treated like a woman. Wolfson (1989:173) states that "What we see in these analyses of speech behavior to women is that the way a woman is spoken to is, no matter what her status, a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society."

Wolfson (1989:185) mentions two conditions important for teachers and curriculum writers to consider in regard to sexism and language. One is the fact that, much as we would like to do away

with stereotypes about men and women, they do exist and it is important for the language learner to know what they are as they will confront them. But, we need to have discussions that are open and honest concerning the underlying social factors which are responsible for the stereotypes.

"The second, and perhaps most delicate point to be considered in this regard is the question of how to balance instruction on sexist usage with the need for language learners to learn to use appropriately sex-linked forms of speech" (Wolfson, 1989:185). This question is by no means answered.

In the next section, I provide a sample lesson plan that can be used to introduce compliments to a low-intermediate to an advanced class. This sample lesson focuses on the syntactic form, and some issues of status, topic and gender. The goal of the lesson is to give an example of how some of the sociolinguistic rules regarding compliments can be incorporated into a lesson.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN:

Paying Compliments

I. Behavioral Objective:

At the end of this introductory lesson, students, working in pairs, will be given two scenarios. They will be able to create two appropriate dialogues (@4-6 lines) paying a compliment in each.

General Goal:

To provide the opportunity for conversation while introducing students on how to pay compliments (on a basic level) as well as the role compliments play in U.S. culture.

II.

A. Set Induction:

Compliment each student as they enter the classroom. Use the syntactic structures to be taught. The compliments should refer to appearance, a skill or a possession. For example, "That's a nice dress Angelita. I like your backpack Mohammed."

B. Cultural Discussion and Exercises:

1. Ask the students if they remember what you said to them when they entered the classroom. Prompt them if necessary. Ask them what you were doing. Try to elicit the response "paying compliments" or something similar. Write "to pay a compliment" on the board.

2. What are compliments? Elicit responses from students and negotiate a meaning and write it on the board. The definition should be something like "saying something nice about someone or something."

3. Activate the students' complimenting schemata.

   a) Do you pay compliments in your country?

   b) What do you compliment people on?

   c) Do women or men pay more compliments?

   d) Do women or men receive more compliments?

   e) What do we compliment people on in the U.S?

   f) Who pays and receives more compliments in the U.S?

   Different questions can be asked depending on what aspect of compliment exchanges you want to focus on in your lesson. This is where stereotypes, language and sex, status, etc. can be discusses. This discussion can be very basic or in depth depending on the level of the students.

4. Tell the students to listen and pay them some more compliments focusing on the syntactic patterns you will teach. Give them a chance to respond with "thanks, thank you". Ask them if they can tell you what you said. Write some examples on the board. I would suggest giving examples of the following five syntactic patterns:

   1. (a) NP Be (Int) Adj

      (b) Be Looking (Int) Adj

2. I (Int) Like NP

3. (a) Pro Be a (Int) Adj NP

   (b) Pro Be (Int) (a) Adj NP

4. (Int) Adj (NP)

5. What (a) (Adj) NP!

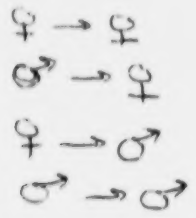
The first three are important as they are the most commonly used syntactic forms and the last two are important because of the preference men and women have in their use as mentioned above. In a very low level class, I would not use the fourth and fifth patterns and limit the first and third patterns to one option each.

5. Ask "How do you respond to a compliment?" Elicit "thanks" and/or "thank you" if you can. If not, tell them. This is also a time to discuss various response types and issues of gender and response preference if it is appropriate. Cultural differences in appropriate responses to compliment can be discusses here as well.

A number of mechanical and meaningful drills can be done here to reinforce the syntactic patterns just taught. For example, flashcards can be made with different pictures such as a dress, a walkman, shoes, jewlery, car, hat, backpack, etc. (this is a good way to recycle vocabulary) and do a substitution drill with sentences with sentences on the board. Also, students can be asked to compliment a person in the room.

6. Once you feel that the students have a good grasp of the

vocabulary and sytactic structure of the compliments, give a brief description of compliment exchanges in the U.S. based on sex and topic. The following diagram can be used:



appearance/ability
appearance/ability
ability/appearance
ability/possession

Explain that this diagram represents generalities, not rigid facts. Have examples of compliment exchanges representing the above interaction to illustrate this point.

Many different types of exercises can be done at this point. Since mechanical and meaningful drills have been done before in order to emphasis the syntactic structures and vocabulary, focus on meaningful and communicative exercises at this point. You can have cards with different scenarios written on them in which a compliment takes place. With the students working in pairs, have them create a dialogue to present to the class. Make sure there are plenty of female-female, female-male, male-female , and male-male scenarios. This type of lesson lends itself well to homework assignments that have the students focusing on the English language and

U.S. culture. You can have the students pay two or three compliments to different Americans and report on how they responded. They can be asked to listen to Americans and write down examples of compliment exchanges. All the compliments observed can be pooled and analysed together as a class. An essay can be assigned, comparing and contrasting compliment behavior in the United States vs. the compliment behavior in the students' native country.

SUMMARY OF SECOND SECTION:

In this section the relationship between sociolinguistic research and TESOL was briefly explored, emphasizing the continuing need to combine these two fields. Compliments were presented as one of the speech acts that should be researched and taught. By evaluating six textbooks, I was able to show that, even though much is know about how language functions in our speech community, our knowledge is not complete. In gaining a better understanding of how different speech acts function in American English, textbooks can be supplemented, and new material developed to provide the students with information they need to be competent in using English. A sample lesson plan was provided to show how something as complex as compliment exchanges can be introduced, even with low proficient students.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I examined the function of compliments in the

United States based on work done by Janet Holmes in New Zealand. My results support Holmes' theory that compliments serve more than one function and that women tend to experience complimenhts as positively affective speech act while men tend to experience them as FTAs. I also noted three trends found in my data, the use a response type I call a **Lax Acknowledgement** which deflects a compliment, the use of the discourse marker **well** which prefaced a number of compliment responses, and the use of multiple responses in reaction to a compliment. In the second section, I explored the connection between sociolinguistic research and TESOL using compliment behavior as the basis for the discussion.

Though our understanding of compliment behavior in the United States has increased due to the soiciolinguistic studies that have been done, there is still a great deal we do not know. Some of the questions that still need to be investigated include: 1) If compliments do not serve a bonding functions for men in the United States, is there a speech act that does? 2) When men do use compliments, how do they function? 3) How exactly do the trends I noted function? etc.

More importantly, almost all the sociolinguistic research on compliment exchanges has focused on compliment behavior within one subgroup of the United States, that of the white middle class. We can not assume that the behavior described in these studies is representative of compliment behavior found in other subcultures of the United States. Research needs to be done within each enthic/socio-economicgroup to be able to describe what linguistic behavior is representative of each group. This research is

important, not only for its application to TESOL, but also to increase understanding amongst one another within our own society.

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